

Leader of Downstate Crime Network Sentenced to Two Life Terms Plus 769 Years

Also, life in prison for man who killed woman on Wilmington playground; other cases also resolved

The leader of a violent crime network that operated in Sussex and Kent counties will spend the remainder of his life in prison after being sentenced to the maximum time allowed by a Superior Court judge. A jury convicted Steven Kellam, 37, of Seaford, last year for his involvement in a January 2014 home invasion robbery on Harmon's Hill Road in Millsboro, during which Cletis Nelson and William Hopkins were shot and killed, in addition to several other crimes. Kellam's criminal enterprise was brought down in the summer of 2015 by a joint investigation by the Delaware State Police and the Delaware Department of Justice, called Operation "In the House." Kellam was convicted by a jury in November 2017 of 2 counts of Murder First Degree, 1 count of Organized Crime and Racketeering, 27 counts of Possession of a Firearm During the Commission of a Felony, 3 counts of Conspiracy Second Degree, 1 count of Conspiracy First Degree, 3 counts of Home Invasion, 2 counts of Robbery First Degree, 2 counts of Assault Second Degree, 1 count of Assault Third Degree, 2 counts of Attempted Robbery First Degree, and 1 count of Wearing a Disguise During the Commission of a Felony. Deputy Attorneys General Chris Hutchison and Martin Cosgrove prosecuted the case and secured the sentence of 2 life terms plus 769 years in prison.

The Wilmington man convicted of stabbing his girlfriend to death in the Canby Park playground in 2015 will spend the rest of his life in prison. A Superior Court judge sentenced Gary Perkins, 37, to life in prison plus 36 years for the death of 29-year-old Jamie Murphy. In July 2015, police received a call

about a woman lying at the top of a sliding board in the playground near the 700 block of South Union Street in Wilmington. Murphy had suffered numerous stab wounds. In 2017, Perkins was convicted by a Superior Court jury of Murder First Degree, Possession of a Deadly Weapon During the Commission of a Felony, Possession of a Deadly Weapon by a Person Prohibited, and Criminal Contempt in Court Proceedings. Deputy Attorneys General Michael Degliobizzi and Barzilai Axelrod prosecuted the case, with assistance from social worker Jen Kutney, homicide paralegals Stacey Coupe and Kim Moro, and tech specialist Theodore Griffin from the Department of Justice. The Chief Investigative Officer was Sergeant Joseph Bucksner of the Wilmington Police Department.

A string of robberies of businesses in the Newark area led to a prison sentence for a 27-year-old Newark man. In December 2017, Michael Berwick pled guilty to 2 counts of Robbery First Degree, a count of Robbery Second Degree and a count of Attempted Robbery Second Degree in connection to a crime spree in March of 2017. Over the course of a week, police believed Berwick held up a fast food restaurant, convenience store, Chinese Restaurant, Dairy Queen, and a Dunkin' Donuts. Berwick also admitted to a violation of probation based on a prior robbery conviction. A Superior Court judge sentenced Berwick to 9 years in prison, followed by 6 months of either home confinement or work release, then 2 years of probation. Deputy Attorney General Phillip Casale prosecuted the case. The social worker assigned was Courtney Cochran, and the lead investigators were Sgt. Jonathon Packard of the Delaware State Police and Det. Julia Fabbroni from the Middletown Police Department.

Deputy Attorneys General Alicia Porter and Lindsay Taylor secured a guilty plea and prison sentence for a Dover man on a weapons charge. In June 2017, Denzel Braker, 22, was a passenger in a car parked in the road on Stevenson Drive in Dover. Officers, knowing Braker was on probation, made contact

in reference to probation curfew violation. During a pat down, officers found a 9mm semi-automatic handgun in Braker's waistband. Braker, barred from having a gun because of a previous violent felony conviction on an assault charge, pled guilty to Possession of a Firearm by a Person Prohibited. A Superior Court judge sentenced Braker to 7 years in prison, followed by 6 months of work release, then 18 months of probation.

A former employee of the Delaware Veterans Home pled guilty to charges related to stealing from an 87-year-old resident of the home. During the spring and summer of 2016, Courtney Sampson, 28, of Dover, while working as the housekeeping supervisor, stole checks and a credit card from a man in long-term care at the Milford facility. Sampson drove an acquaintance to cash checks taken from the resident, and used the man's credit card to make several purchases, including paying his own cell phone bill. Sampson pled guilty to Unlawful Use of a Payment Card and Theft Under \$1500, giving him a criminal record, and was ordered by a Superior Court judge to pay \$817, which was the amount stolen from the resident plus additional costs for the criminal investigation. The judge also ordered 2 years of probation. Deputy Attorney General Lisa Barchi of the DOJ Medicaid Fraud Control Unit prosecuted the case with assistance from Special Investigators Anthony Davolos and Paul Reutter.